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English II, Pre-IB, AP English Language

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Outline Title (*same as paper title*)

Thesis: The ‘theme’ or ‘thesis’ of a work of literature is not actually one singular idea but a variety of arguments an author makes in a work that may be derived by using different acceptable approaches ranging from analyzing specific literary elements to sometimes contradictory critical approaches; this means that neither the reader, nor the author, nor the context in which the text was written has entire control over the meaning of any one work.

I. Introduction

A. Brief definition of ‘theme’

1. ‘Theme’ versus ‘thesis’
2. Main idea versus problem/question versus argument (Roberts 5 – 10; Weston 32 – 33)

B. Differences in approaches using literary elements

C. Differences in approaches using critical methods

D. Thesis statement

II. The function of themes

A. Central idea of specific area of investigation

B. Four broad areas of literary investigation (Roberts 4)

1. Meaning
2. Structure
3. Style
4. Background and influences

C. Investigation of singular idea or aspect still maintains the integrity of work

1. The fourth voyage of Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* “unchanged by all the critical essays written

about it” (Roberts 3)

2. Evolution of interpretation allows for multiplicity of views (Roberts 3)

a. Critics saw evidence that Swift hated mankind (Roberts 3)

b. Recent work shows Swift a humanitarian trying to change readers (Roberts 3)

D. Themes need to be unified and express singular ideas

1. Maintains specificity (Roberts 6)

2. Show organization and plan of direction (Roberts 5)

III. Comparison of literary approaches to themes: examples

A. Character analysis

1. Can also use the psychoanalytic critical approach (psyche, ego, consciousness)

a. Marshal McLuhan relates ‘narcosis’ to the Narcissus myth in *Ulysses* (41)

(1) Leopold Bloom’s bath has narcotic effect (Joyce 86)

(2) Etymological connection (“Narco-”, def. 1)

b. Also applied even when author wrote before Freud, such as to Shakespeare in *Macbeth*

(1) Lady Macbeth’s barrenness (Freud 41)

(2) Problems of Lady Macbeth’s success (Freud 41)

B. Discussing ideas

1. Direct statements by author (Roberts 80)

a. By author’s persona

b. Author versus narrator

2. Dramatic statements made by characters (Roberts 80)

3. Characters who stand for ideas

a. E.g. *The Faerie Queene*, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, *Everyman*

b. E.g. Aldous Huxley’s form of ‘novel of ideas’ (Roberts 81)

4. Discussing problems: artistic, conceptual, historical

C. Imagery

1. Definitions (and image versus imagery) (Perrine 45)

2. Diction

a. “[...] red, red rose/That’s newly sprung in June” (Burns 1-3)

b. From “Go Lovely Rose”: “Then die—that she/The common fate of all things rare/May read
in thee:” (Walker)

3. Attitude

a. *Antony and Cleopatra* (Shakespeare 4.12.20-24)

b. *Tom Jones* comic mock epic simile (Fielding 2.4)

D. Prosody (Roberts 182)

1. Sound

a. Phonetics (Francis 119-61)

b. Vowels, semivowels, and consonants

2. Rhythm

a. Meter

b. Pause and emphasis

(1) Rhetorical variation, e.g. Pope (Roberts 184)

(2) End-stopped versus enjambment

3. Rhyme

IV. Comparison of critical methods

A. Analyzing historical period

1. Research limited to finding more information about topic selected for theme (Roberts 216)

2. Should not find evidence for historical period but for literary reaction to history (Roberts 215)

a. *The Grapes of Wrath* and Steinbeck’s views on American politics in 1930s

b. Theodore Drieser’s character Hurstwood in *Sister Carrie* as response to seemingly random
political and economic change

B. Evaluation

1. Definition (Fitzgerald 5)

2. Standards

- a. “Truth”: Roberts defines as universality or generality (226)
- b. Affirmativeness: show worth of human beings (Roberts 226)
- c. ‘The joint force and full result of all’ from Pope’s *Essay on Criticism* (Roberts 227)
 - (1) Judge whole, not part
 - (2) To describe totality of work: ‘whatness’ and ‘radiance’ (Joyce qtd. in Roberts 227)
 - (3) Involvement
 - (4) Aristotelian theory of purgation or catharsis in tragedy (Roberts 228)
- d. Vitality: life of own and compared to human being (Roberts 228)
 - (1) Can offer different reader-response at different points in life
 - (2) New generations find worth
- e. Beauty: allied with symmetry, harmony, and proportion (Roberts 229)
 - (1) 18th century conception of ‘variety within order’ (Roberts 229)
 - (2) Romantic and post-Romantic period idea that beauty through greater freedom

V. Conclusion

- A. Summary of comparisons
- B. Evaluation of impact of diverse themes
- C. ‘Point Forward’